

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 2618

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIAN VOTER REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN ENDS ON SCHEDULE

REF: (A) LAGOS 1952, (B) LAGOS 1422

SUMMARY: THE NIGERIAN VOTER REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN
ENDED ON SCHEDULE ON FEBRUARY 28 DESPITE CLAIMS THAT
THOUSANDS OF VOTERS REMAIN UNREGISTERED. OVERALL
REGISTRATION FIGURES SHOULD BE AVILABLE BY MARCH 7.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE SIX-WEEK NIGERIAN VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE
ENDED ON SCHEDULE ON FEBRUARY 28 DESPITE WIDESPREAD
REPORTS DURING THE CLOSING WEEK THAT THOUSAND OF
VOTERS WERE STILL UNREGISTERED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

2. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, WHOLE STREETS IN
MAINLAND LAGOS WERE MISSED BY THE REGISTRATION OFFICERS.
LIKEWISE, IT WAS REPORTED THAT HALF THE PEOPLE IN ABEOKUTA,
OGUN STATE, WERE UNREGISTERED. SIMILAR REPORTS CAME
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FROM BENDEL, CROSS RIVER, ONDO, OYO, KADUNA, KANO, RIVERS
AND SOKOTO STATES. PART OF THE PROBLEM APPARENTLY WAS
A SHORTAGE OF REGISTRATION OFFICERS WHICH LED GENERAL OBASANJO
TO ORDER THOUSANDS OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS INTO ACTION DURING
THE LAST WEEK. IN ADDITION, A SOURCE INSIDE FEDECO TOLD US THAT
TWO STATES HAD COMPLETELY RUN OUT OF REGISTRATION CARDS.

3. DESPITE THESE PROBLEMS, THE FMG, FOLLOWING A MEETING OF FEDECO STATE COMMISSIONERS IN KANO ON FEBRUARY 16, DECIDED NOT TO EXTEND THE FEBRUARY 28 DEADLINE, REJECTING WIDESPREAD CALLS IN THE PRESS FOR SUCH ACTION. THIS DECISION WAS ANNOUNCED ON FEBRUARY 17 BY FEDECO CHIEF MICHAEL ANI AND CONFIRMED BY GENERAL OBASANJO THREE DAYS LATER.

4. THE RESULTS HAVE NOT YET BEEN TABULATED, HOWEVER, ALHAJI ADAMU KURFI, FEDECO EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT OVERALL FIGURES FOR THE ELECTORATE SHOULD BE AVAILABLE BY MARCH 7. KURFI BELIEVES THAT THE FINAL FIGURE WILL CLOSELY APPROACH FEDECO'S PROJECTED FIGURE OF 39.9 MILLION VOTERS. KURFI SAID THAT THE PROJECTION WAS BASED ON A POPULATION ESTIMATE OF 78.5 MILLION WHICH IN TURN IS AN INTERPOLATION OF 1963 CENSUS DATA.

5. AS OF FEBRUARY 16, FEDECO SAID THAT 27.4 MILLION VOTERS HAD BEEN REGISTERED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, THIS FIGURE WAS NATIONAL TOTAL INCLUDING 14 STATE TOTALS UP TO FEBRUARY 10, 4 STATE TOTALS TO FEBRUARY 3, AND ONE STATE TO JANUARY 27. REPORTS FROM SPECIFIC STATES ARE SKETCHY AT THIS TIME. AS REPORTED IN REF A, 900,000 VOTERS IN LAGOS STATE HAD BEEN REGISTERED BY FEBRUARY 3. IN BENUE STATE, 1.4 OF 1.7 MILLION PROJECTED VOTERS WERE REGISTERED BY FEBRUARY 20. IN BENDEL STATE, 1.6

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OF 2 MILLION PROJECTED VOTERS WERE ON THE ROLLS WITH A WEEK TO GO.

6. COMMENT: THE VERDICT IS STILL OUT ON WHETHER THE REGISTRATION EXERCISE IS A SUCCESS. HOWEVER, IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, FEDECO OFFICIALS ARE STRESSING MORE AND MORE THAT IT IS PART OF A CONTINUING PROCESS AND THAT THE INITIAL REGISTER WHICH WILL BE PRODUCED WILL BE OPEN TO EXTENSIVE REVISION. KURFI SAID THAT STILL UNREGISTERED VOTERS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO SIGN UP LATER DESPITE RECENT FEDECO WARNINGS THAT THEY WOULD HAVE TO EXPLAIN THEIR FAILURE TO REGISTER ON THE FIRST ROUND.

7. A MORE VEXING QUESTION IS HOW WELL THE MACHINERY WHICH IS BEING SET UP WILL WORK UNDER ELECTION CONDITIONS. THE INEXPERIENCE AND CONFUSION OF FEDECO WORKERS IN THE FIELD DURING THE REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR THE FUTURE. IN ADDITION, ELEMENTS OF THE MACHINERY WHICH APPEAR TO BE REASONABLE IN THEORY MAY NOT WORK IN PRACTICE. FOR EXAMPLE, SEVERAL NIGERIANS HAVE REMARKED TO US THAT FEDECO'S SEEMINGLY INGENIOUS SYSTEM OF REGISTRATION CARDS WITHOUT VOTERS' NAMES ON THEM,

WHICH IS DESIGNED TO PREVENT FRAUD, IS SURE TO COME A
CROPPER IN THE TYPICALLY NUMEROUS NIGERIAN FAMILY WHERE
CARES WILL BE LOST, STOLEN OR EXCHANGED. IN SHORT,
FEDECO'S PROBLEMS ARE NOT OVER YET. END COMMENT.
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